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ABSTRACT

This report compares a typical newspaper acccunt of an event with other possible ways of narrating the event. It argues that journlists' beliefs about the appropriate format, style, and content for a news story work in concert to obscure the structure of the story and the relations among subparts, and thus serve to thwart their presumed goal in writing: providing an acccunt of events that will be easily readable by an ordinary person. The report concludes that there are clear counterparts to editors standards for the format and style appropriate to books intended for beginning readers, and hypothesizes that children who are exposed primarily to texts written to conform to these standards (short sentences, no paragraphing, relations inexplicit between events recounted) may fail to become good readers because they do not learn to expect connection among ideas, and frequently fail to see it, even in better-written texts. (Authors)

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ORGANIZATION, GOALS, AND COMPREHENSIBILITY IN NARRATIVES: NEWSWRITING, A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

A typical newspaper account of an event is compared with other possible ways of narrating the event. It is argued that journalists' beliefs about the appropriate format, style, and content for a news story work in concert to obscure the structure of the story and the relations among sub-parts, and thus serve to thwart their presumed goal in writing: providing an account of events which will be easily readable by an ordinary person.

In many of the areas analyzed, there are clear counterparts to editors' standards for the format and style appropriate to books intended for beginning readers, and it is hypothesized that children who are exposed primarily to texts written to conform to these standards (short sentences, no paragraphing, relations inexplicit between events recounted) may fail to become good readers because they do not learn to expect connection among ideas, and not expecting it, frequently fail to see it, even in better-written texts.

Organization, Goals, and Comprehensibility in Narratives: Newswriting, a Case Study

Introduction

A few years ago, shortly after I had become a fan of a certain Big Ten basketball team, I picked up the sports section of a local paper to read about the previous night's away game, which I had not been able to hear broadcast. Now the sports section was a part of the paper that I was not accustomed to reading, and I was, in my naiveté, dismayed that the story seemed to consist of just a list of facts about the game--who played what position, shooting statistics, point spreads at various junctures--interspersed among uninformative quotations from post-game interviews with coaches and players. I had no sense of the game as an event, with structure and tension and a resolution.

As I sat puzzling over this observation, and the fact that it so surprised me, I began to wonder what effect a steady diet of this kind of writing might have on younsters who didn't voluntarily read much else. It came upon me as a revelation that perhaps the reason some adolescents of my acquaintance did poorly in their content courses in school was that no matter how hard they studied, they must have been reading their textbooks as if they were simply lists of unconnected facts to be memorized. No wonder they had such fuzzy understanding of historical events and scientific principles!

I began to analyze the structure of the basketball article (and accounts of the same game in other papers), and saw that in fact there were plausible connections to be made among the facts reported in successive paragraphs of the articles. Amazed at the great amount of inferencing that had to be done in order to see these connections, I looked at non-sports reporting, thinking of writing a critique of game-sports reporting. But the facts reported in accounts of accidents and political events were not related to each other any more explicitly than the facts in accounts of games, and I began to ask why newswriting seemed so hard to read when read carefully. That is the question I try to answer here, and from the answers, sketch implications for editors, not only of newspapers, but of materials designed expressly for young readers as well.

Suppose that on walking into a meeting room you find on a table, among the other handouts, a stack of copies of the following text. Someone urges you to pick one up, and read it, so you do.

An Iranian Protest in Chicago

The Chicago police have reported that a demonstration in the downtown area yesterday against the Shah of Iran culminated in violence, as a result of which 173 people were arrested. The members of the group, which included 141 men and 32 women, were not expected to be charged formally. The fight broke out during news media coverage of the Shah's treatment of dissidents in Iran. A 23-year-old spokeswoman for the Iranians, Sheila Khalili, said that a scuffle started when a few demonstrators noticed a man who was identified only as Farshid observing the protest. She said he was a member of the Shah's secret police, and had been present at several

demonstrations. The police Commander of the First District, Paul McLaughlin, said he doubted that there was an agent present. He said, "I know of no agents." Khalili said the man "started making provocative statements and harassing us." She said a fight started between a few demonstrators and Farshid, and other demonstrators tried to break it up. At that point, she said, the policemen nearby apparently believed a riot had started, and moved in, involving more people. The police called for reinforcements immediately, and 15 squadrols were backed up, doors swung open, to the curb along Randolph Street. After they decided what to do, the police broke the demonstrators into two groups, surrounded them, and trotted them off in small groups into the wagons. In the squadrols, demonstrators chanted "Down with the Shah," and stamped on the floor. One woman tried to cover her face with a blue and white scarf, but a policeman ordered her to take it off, as he pulled it away. McLaughlin said the students had been marching through the Loop and near North Side since noon, demonstrating outside numerous newspapers and television stations, with police accompanying them the entire time. He said that they came south on Michigan Avenue to Randolph and east to the Standard Oil Building at about 4:45 p.m. Among the tenants there are the Iranian consulate and the Chicago bureau of Newsweek magazine. Then, at 5:30 p.m. the students walked a block west and stopped in front of the Prudential Building, where, McLaughlin said, they began attacking people leaving the Prudential and the Standard Oil buildings. He said, "One man said something to them and they started punching him. Three or four of them started punching him." He said all the Iranians were arrested. He did not indicate what charges would be placed but said the entire group was arrested because "they all took part in the attack. . . . They were hitting women and everything." McLaughlin said that one police officer was injured seriously and some other people were taken to hospitals. He said 11 officers were present when the fighting started. Some of the bystanders who were

attacked were hit with demonstrators' signs, according to McLaughlin. One of the signs said, "Shah is a U.S. puppet, down with the Shah."

Perhaps you are able to make your way through that, perhaps not. But most likely you agree with me in judging it to be to some extent disorganized and undirected, unconnected and jumbled up, with the result that it is difficult to follow.

Now, it may come as a surprise that this paragraph is no less and no more than a newspaper article written by professionals (the AP), with the journalese edited out, but this is what it looked like before the editing:

Police Arrest Iranian Protestors

Chicago (AP) -- A demonstration against the Shah of Iran erupted into violence on a downtown street Tuesday and 173 persons were arrested, police said.

Most of the 141 men and 32 women taken into custody were not expected to be charged formally, said Assistant Deputy Superintendent Carl Dobrich.

The fight broke out during a protest in front of the Prudential Building against coverage by American media of alleged harassment and torture by the Shah of Iran against dissidents there.

A spokeswoman for the Iranians, Sheila Khalili, 23, said a scuffle started when a few demonstrators noticed a man, identified only as Farshid, observing the protest.

She said the man is a member of the shah's secret police and has been present at several demonstrations.

Police Cmdr. Paul V. McLaughlin of the First District said he doubted whether there was an agent present.

"I know of no agents," he said.

Mrs. Khalili said the man "started making provocative statements and harassing us." She said a fight started between a few demonstrators and Farshid, and other demonstrators tried to break it up.

At that point, police nearby apparently believed a riot had started and moved in, swelling the melee, she said.

Police called for reinforcements immediately, and 15 squadrols were backed up, doors swung open, to the curb along Randolph Street. The provocative demonstrators were broken into two groups and ringed by police, then trotted off in small groups into the wagons after police decided what to do.

Demonstrators in the squadrols chanted "Down with the Shah" and stamped on the floor. One women tried to cover her face with a blue and white scarf, but a policeman ordered, "take it off," as he pulled it away.

McLaughlin said the students had been marching through the downtown Loop and near North Side since noon, demonstrating outside numerous newspapers and television stations, with police accompanying them the entire time.

They came south on Michigan Avenue to Randolph and east to the Standard Oil Building at about 4:45 p.m., he said. Among the high-rise building's tenants are the Iranian consulate and the Chicago bureau of Newsweek magazine.

Then, at 5:30 p.m., the students walked a block west and stopped in front of the Prudential Building, where, McLaughlin said, they began attacking people leaving the Prudential and the Standard Oil buildings. "One man said something to them and they started punching him," McLaughlin said. "Three or four of them started punching him."

He said all the Iranians were arrested. He did not specify what charges would be placed but said the entire group was arrested because "they all took part in the attack . . . They were hitting women and everything."

> One police officer was injured seriously and some other persons were taken to hospitals, he said.
>
> McLaughlin said 11 officers were present when the fighting started.
>
> Some of the bystanders who were attacked were hit with demonstrators' signs, McLaughlin said. One such sign said, "Shah is a U.S. puppet. Down with the Shah."

My purpose here is to demonstrate how the organization of narratives can be shaped by the narrator's perception of the goal of the discourse, and of sub-goals relating to its construction. This may seem an obvious point, but appreciating the extent to which it is true may require close examination of actual and hypothetical discourses. What follows, concluded in the section on "Organization as a Function of Purpose," is an attempt to provide this.

First I will look at some of the things we can point to in the AP article that might be contributing to our impression of disorganization, and then compare the AP article with some other ways of narrating the incident it reports. That done, I will try to shed some light on how it is that standard newswriting will almost inevitably produce this disorganized effect, and speculate on the implications of these findings. Perhaps I should emphasize here that the AP article is not a particularly bad newspaper article. It's fairly typical, in fact. It's done by professionals, and professionally done. My purpose is not to throw stones at the journalism profession as a whole, but rather, to examine this kind of writing closely, from different perspectives, in an attempt to discover why it seems oddly organized and barely connected.

What then are the observable properties of the AP article that cause us to feel it is unconnected and unorganized when we don't know it is a news story? To begin with, there is the paragraphing. You may have noticed that the AP article is not one paragraph, like the first handout, but eighteen. But since there are only 27 sentences, and most of the bi- or poly-sentential paragraphs contain sentences which are so closely related that one could hardly miss the connection, the paragraphing does not really make much of an improvement. It can hardly be taken as imposing a significant amount of structure on the content presented.[1] If we assume that the paragraphs represent units of discourse structure, the article has a superficial structural analysis something like what we see in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

If we use some of our background knowledge about protestors and newswriting, we can probably organize some of these paragraphs into larger units, so that a gross structural analysis would look more like that in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Still, eleven subdivisions for a 27-sentence text doesn't bespeak a high level of organization . . . and yet once we know that this is a news article, and take it as a news article, it doesn't seem so difficult or so disorganized.[2] We read scores of news articles like it every week, without noticing or remarking any difficulty or displeasure. I assume that the reason for this is that we have learned to read newspapers differently from

Table 1

Superficial Structure of "Police Arrest Iranian Protestors"

Paragraphs		Sentences
I.	What, when, where, how many [t_0]	(1)
II.	Details of arrests	(2)
III.	Details of where; why	(3)
IV.	Protestors' version of how violence began [t_{-2}]	(4)
V.	Protestors' version of why violence began	(5)
VI.	Police denial of account presented in IV-V	(6)
VII.	Quote from police supporting VI	(7)
VIII.	Protestors' chronological account [t_{-1}-t_0]	(8-9)
IX.	Continuation of VIII [t_1]	(10)
X.	Subsequent events [t_2-t_4]	(11-12)
XI.	Protestors' behavior after arrest [t_5]	(13-14)
XII.	Police commander's chronological account; background [t_{-5}]	(15)
XIII.	Continuation of XII; setting [t_{-4}]	(16-17)
XIV.	Continuation of XIII; catalyzing incident [t_{-3}-t_0]	(18-20)
XV.	Police rationale for arrests	(21-23)
XVI.	Consequences of event	(24)
XVII.	Police preparedness	(25)
XVIII.	Colorful details: signs used as weapons	(26-27)

Table 2

Macrostructure of "Police Arrest Iranian Protestors"

I.	Asserts event	(1)
II.	Details	(2-3)
III.	Protestors' account	(4-5)
IV.	Police comment on III	(6-7)
V.	Continuation of III	(8-10)
VI.	Reporter's account of events subsequent to those in V	(11-14)
VII.	Police account of events	(15-20)
VIII.	Police rationale for arrests	(21-23)
IX.	Consequences of event	(24)
X.	Police preparedness	(25)
XI.	Colorful details	(26-2)

other kinds of narrative texts--we skim for facts. If the fact seems relevant to our understanding of the event, we integrate it and organize it with other facts, by ourselves, in comprehension. If it is not obviously relevant, we ignore it. I suspect that very few people who do not do this feel that they can be bothered to read newspapers, since it involves wading through such difficult prose.

As Frank Luther Mott said 26 years ago in a state of the art review,

> The time is long gone when anyone can be expected to read the paper thoroughly from end to end; in this era of impatient readers and forty-page papers, skimming is not only common but the almost universal rule. The structure of the modern news story is suited to the skimmer.

(if this was true in 1952, it must be even truer, in this era of impatient readers, and 200-page papers.)

In contrast to the 45 or so seconds that it takes to skim the AP article, it took me several hours, and several revisions to figure out the relevance of and connections among the 27 sentences it contains well enough for me to say I understood as well as can be expected from a partially contradictory text how all the facts were related. Although the effect of the paragraphing is fairly clear in isolation, other characteristics and properties of the news story that contribute to adverse judgments about its organization and connectedness can perhaps best be brought out by comparing it to other possible ways of organizing and presenting the facts of the incident reported.

Organization as a Function of Purpose

How else might the facts reported in the AP article be organized? We'l, we can imagine that a sociologist proposing to study how political protests degenerate into violent confrontations might tell it as it is in (A), one of t.e protestors might tell it as it is in (B), and a reporter might describe it at dinner as in (C).

A. "Proposal for Grant to Study How Political Protests Evolve into Confrontatio-s with Police"

[The text of interest here is supposed to be illustrative background material in a proposal for a grant to study how peaceful political protests evolve into confrontations with police. Preceding this narrative section there would presumably be a discussion of long-term consequences of such incidents and the importance to society of knowing the causes of such incidents, presumably so that they could be managed in a manner more in society's interests. The narrative would be immediately preceded by an introduction which declared that it was an example of the sort of incident the research is intended to explain, and ultimately, prevent.

Following the narrative would come a list of questions which the research would be designed to answer: e.g., Were the police officers on the scene given sufficient background on the purpose and context of the protest to understand demonstrators' explanations? Should plainclothes policemen in radio contact with uniformed officers have infiltrated the demonstrators to ensure better communication about what was happening? Should more policemen have been deployed to begin with? Etc., etc. Next would come a discussion of the scope of the research, a discussion of the research plan, etc.]

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On Tuesday, May 16, 173 Iranian students (141 men and 32 women), in a downtown Chicago protest of American media coverage of alleged harassment and torture of dissidents by the Shah of Iran, were arrested when Chicago police moved in to break up a fight between a few demonstrators and a man they claimed was a member of the Shah's secret police. One police officer was injured seriously, and some other persons were taken to hospitals. The entire group of demonstrators was arrested because the police commander, Paul V. McLaughlin, felt that they all took part in the attack. He claimed that "they were hitting women and everything," although at the time of the arrest he did not specify what charges would be placed against them. Although Assistant Deputy Superintendent Carl Dobrich said that most of the demonstrators were not expected to be charged formally, we must still inquire why the police were unable to halt the disturbance, transforming it instead into a conflict between police and demonstrators. A look at the events in a little more detail should shed some light on the matter.

According to McLaughlin, the students had been marching through the downtown Loop and near North Side since noon, demonstrating outside newspapers and TV stations. Police were accompanying them the entire time. At about 4:45 they came south on Michigan Avenue to Randolph and east to the Standard Oil Building, which houses the Chicago bureau of Newsweek magazine as well as the Iranian Consulate. Then at 5:30, the demonstrators walked a block west and stopped in front of the Prudential Building.

What happened next is not entirely clear. According to Sheila Khalili, a spokesperson for the Iranians, a man she identified as Farshid, and claimed was a member of the Shah's Secret Police, who had been present at several demonstrations, began making provocative statements, and harassing the demonstrators. She said that a fight started between a few demonstrators and Farshid, and then other demonstrators quickly moved in to break it up.

According to the police commander, when the demonstrators stopped in front of the Prudential Building they began attacking people leaving the Prudential and the Standard Oil buildings. Some, McLaughlin said, were hit with demonstrators' signs. He did report that one man said something to them and three or four of the demonstrators started punching him, but denied knowledge of the presence of any agents of the Shah. However, when one of the women arrested tried to shield her face from view, police took pains to prevent her, which suggests collusion with a SAVAK agent on the scene.

The events after this point are a matter of public record. Eleven police officers were present when the fighting started. They apparently believed that a riot was starting, and moved into the scuffle on this assumption. They immediately called for reinforcements. Fifteen squadrols were sent and the police separated the demonstrators into two groups. After surrounding them, the police escorted them, in small groups, into the wagons, where they continued to chant "Down with the Shah."

B. SHEILA

[Context: Sheila and an acquaintance meet by chance on the street on a sunny day in May. Sheila is an articulate young woman, with a reputation for being able to keep a cool head under pressure, which is why a student protest group has chosen her as their spokesperson.]

Acquaintance: Sheila! It's been so long. What have you been doing!

Sheila: Well, you wouldn't believe it. I just got out of the Cook County Jail.

A: Whaaat? What happened?

S: Well, you know a bunch of us were downtown protesting yesterday--peacefully--against the Shah and how the American newspapers report what happens to people who protest in Iran. A fight

started when Farshid--the SAVAK agent--started yelling things at us. A bunch of us tried to stop it but the police rounded up all 175 of us and packed us into their wagons and carted us off to the county jail. Then, would you believe this, they didn't even accuse us of doing anything illegal. They let us go--after they busted up the demonstration.

A: God! . . . Well, tell me all about it.

S: Well, we had been marching around the Loop and the near North Side all afternoon. We stopped in front of all the newspaper offices and TV stations, and the police escorted us the whole time.

Then, about quarter to five we go down Michigan Avenue and over Randolph Street to the Standard Oil Building, where the Iranian consulate and Newsweek's Chicago offices are. Everything is cool.

Then we came back and stopped in front of the Prudential Building and that's where we saw Farshid. He starts harassing us, like I said, and when the police see us trying to stop the fight, they think we're starting a riot, I guess--that's what they said on the news--and they moved in. There were only about 10 of them, but they got a whole bunch more there real fast, and 15 police wagons. Then they surrounded small groups of us and pushed us into the wagons.

They were really hostile. . . . Some of the people in the wagons kept up the protest, chanting and stamping, but some of the women (there were about 30 of us) got very upset. One tried to cover her face with her scarf, but a policeman told her to take it off and then pulled it away. . . .

A: Do you suppose she saw someone from SAVAK in the van with her?

S: I don't know. The police didn't believe a word of what we said about what happened. They said they didn't believe there was anyone from SAVAK anywhere at the protest. . . . And they said

we were hitting bystanders!--women bystanders!--with our signs, and they said all of us took part in it and that's why they were arresting all of us. . . . I heard on the news that one of them was hurt pretty bad and that a couple of other people had to be taken to hospitals, but I don't know. . . .

C. REPORTER

[Context: Reporter and spouse have just sat down to a late dinner.]

Spouse: Well, how was your day?

Reporter: Nerve-wracking. Late-breaking story.

S: Oh? What?

R: You'll see it on the 10:00 News. I was downtown covering a protest against the Shah, and there was a near-riot.

S: What happened?

R: Well, this bunch of Iranian students had been marching all around the Loop since noon, protesting against the Shah, and the American media coverage of the treatment of dissidents in Iran. They had a police escort, and everything was very orderly until around 5:30, when they got to the Prudential Building and some of the protestors reacted to a guy who started harassing them. The police apparently thought a riot was starting, and arrested 'em all--all 175 of them. . . . The Iranians said that the man was a SAVAK agent, and that some of the people the police thought were fighting were really trying to stop the fight.

S: He couldn't have been the first SAVAK agent they noticed.

R: I don't know. The police claimed not to know about any SAVAK agents being there. . . . But there must have been, because before the protestors got to the Prudential Building they demonstrated in front of all the radio and TV stations, and in front

of the Standard Oil Building, and the Iranian Consulate is in there, and also the Chicago bureau of Newsweek. The police say they started attacking people who were leaving the Standard Oil and Prudential buildings, hitting women bystanders, hitting people with their signs. They say that's why they arrested all of them--because they all took part in the attack. But I wonder if some of those "women bystanders" weren't some of the 30 or so female demonstrators. . . . Pass the salt please. . . . Anyway, when the police saw whatever they saw, they called reinforcements, backed a bunch of squadrols up to the curb, and surrounded the demonstrators and marched them in, in small groups. Some of them chanted and stamped their feet in the squadrols, but one woman at least was upset enough to try to hide her face with her scarf, until a policeman pulled it away.

S: What did he care?

R: Who knows? . . . You know, after the police carted them all off to the county jail, they let them all go--didn't bring charges against any of them, even though they told us that several people had to be taken to hospitals, and one of the cops was hurt pretty bad.

Now, you might think that Sheila the Protestor and the reporter are a little too discursive to be real, but for the sake of the comparison, let us give them the benefit of the doubt. After all, we can suppose that Sheila has just been through a lot, and is as eager as I would be to share it with someone, and the reporter is also eager to talk to someone for the first time about this incident, an account of which has just been prepared, under some pressure, and according to a strict formula, for a news broadcast.

I have not attempted any controlled experiments to corroborate my opinion that (A-C) are more organized, and easier to understand, than the AP story or a paragraph I handed out, but I have no reason to believe that this would be difficult for an experimental psychologist to do, and I am confident that such experiments would confirm my judgment. But even just assuming that my judgments are basically correct, two questions arise: what makes (A-C) appear more organized than the news report? and what is it about the traditions of newswriting that makes the news report differ in exactly those ways?

There seem to be at least four things that contribute to the judgment that the AP story is less organized. First, if we take the paragraphs in the proposal, and the pauses and topic changes in the "oral" narratives as marking natural structural units, then the AP story has a much larger number of structural units at the same basic level of structure. As sketched in Table 3, the other three accounts are organized into fewer structural units: 5, 5, and 6, respectively, which seem to come closer to exhausting a logically arranged account of the incident; the paragraphs are arranged to give a complete picture of the incident in a reconstructably logical order. This does not seem to be so with the news story. I am not claiming that the news article <u>is</u> unorganized, or disorganized, but rather that it is oddly organized from the point of view of the reader, and that even that odd organization is not perspicuously indicated--by paragraphing, for example.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3

Macrostructures of GRANT PROPOSAL, SHEILA, and REPORTER

GRANT PROPOSAL

I.	Resumé of incident	(1-6)
II.	Events leading up to incident	(7-10)
III.	Protestors' account of genesis of incident	(11-13)
IV.	Police account of genesis of incident	(14-16)
V.	Details of police intervention	(17-22)

SHEILA

I.	Resumé of incident	(1-5)
II.	Background	(6-7)
III.	Scene	(8-9)
IV.	Genesis and climax	(10-13)
V.	Protestors' relations with police	(14-19)

REPORTER

I.	Bare resumé	(1)
II.	Genesis	(2-4)
III.	Motivations--SAVAK presence	(5-7)
IV.	Police version of incident	(8-10)
V.	Details of arrest	(11-12)
VI.	Ironic afterthought	(13)

Second, in the AP story, the individual facts are presented in an order which may be convenient to news editors (about which more later), but which is not convenient to readers. The charts in Table 4 show the difference in the order of facts between the subjectively more organized accounts and the AP account. The point of the chart is to display the lack of correspondence between the order in which information is presented in the AP article, and the orders in the accounts in (A-C). The numbers in the columns refer to the sentences in the text identified at the top of the column; the subscripts refer to parts of a sentence. Thus, sentence 1 in the grant proposal contains the information in sentence 1, the first part of sentence 2, sentence 3, sentence 5, sentence 9, and sentence 10 in the AP story. The next sentence in the grant proposal says what is contained in sentence 24 of the AP story. Sentence 3 contains what was in sentences 21 and 22. And so on. Assuming that the orders in (A-C) are "normal" orders, the relative disorder of the AP story is evident in the extent to which the numbers in the columns headed "AP" are out of sequence.

Insert Table 4 about here

When the accounts of Sheila and the Reporter are compared to each other, and to the account in the grant proposal, Sheila's account and the one in the grant proposal turn out to be the most closely related: it requires only four rearrangements of one or the other to put the content of the sentences of each in the same sequence. Sheila's account and the Reporter's are the next most closely related, requiring five reorderings

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Table 4

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Order of Presentation of Facts

GRANT	AP	SHEILA	AP	REPORTER	AP
1	1, 2_1, 3, 5, 9, 10	1	1_1, 3	1	1_1
2	24	2	4, 8	2	15_1, 3
3	21,22	3	9, 1_2, 12	3	15_3, 18_1, 8, 9_2
4	23	4	2_2	4	10, 1_2
5	2_2	5	--	5	5, 9_2
6	--	6	15_1	6	6
7	15_1	7	15_2	7	15_2, 16, 17
8	15_2	8	16, 17	8	18_2, 23, 26
9	16, 17	9	--	9	22
10	18_1	10	18, 4, 3	10	2_2
11	--	11	8, 9, 10	11	11, 12
12	4, 8	12	25, 11	12	13, 14
13	9	13	12	13	2_1, 24
14	18	14	13, 2_1		
15	26	15	14		
16	19, 20, 6	16	--		
17	14	17	6, 7		
18	--	18	18, 23, 26		
19	25	19	24		
20	10				
21	11_1				
22	11_2, 12_1				
23	12_2, 13				

of one to obtain the order of the other. By contrast, the AP story and the account in the grant proposal, written to conform to the requirements of academic prose, are farthest apart: it takes nine reorderings to make their orders equivalent.

Third, the AP account contains details which appear to be absolutely irrelevant to any reasonable interpretation of the significance of the story, such as the color of the scarf that the protestor tried to cover her face with, and the exact words of the policeman who ordered her to remove it. In fact, the whole scarf episode looks like it is irrelevant, although it would not be unreasonable to make something of it if you assumed that the protest was infiltrated by agents of the Iranian Secret Police known to both the demonstrators and the Chicago police. However, the article itself does not give the reader any reason to believe this. In addition to the irrelevant details, there are redundant details, such as the police commander's exact words (or the reporter's inexact paraphrase) in responding to Khalili's claim that the man beaten was an agent. Another redundancy is the wording on the signs--quoting them doesn't tell the reader any more than can be gotten directly from the first sentence: that the demonstration was a demonstration against the Shah.

Fourth, there are fewer connectives in the AP account than in the others, words like then, because, but, as a result, in particular, etc., which make the relevance of one fact to other explicit, as shown in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

Table 5

Statistical Comparisons of Writing Style

	AP	GRANT	SHEILA	REPORTER
Connectives per sentence	.44	.83	.85	1.0
Connectives per verb	.1875	.3167	.2464	.2407
Total words	494	508	396	360
Average words per sentence	18.2	22.1	19.8	27.7
Range of words per sentence	6-33[a]	7-62[b]	3-38	14-48

Notes: [a]smallest range
[b]largest range

The newspaper account, much more than the others, relies on the reader to infer the relations among facts that are a necessary part of understanding the significance of the facts reported for interpreting the event. There are a number of causes for this (to say reasons might imply that I thought they justified the great demands they make), and I will discuss them presently.

First, however, I want to address directly the question of communicative goal as a determinant of the organization of discourse. All four of the accounts are descriptions of an event. But only the three fabricated accounts are narratives in the sense of chronological descriptions of an event or sequence of events; the AP account is ordered according to the newswriting principle of the inverted pyramid: most "important" (or "newsworthy") facts first, least important last. The three narratives have essentially the same basic structure--brief resumé of the entire incident, then a more detailed chronological narrative. The differences among them arise in the narrator's perspective in the event, and more important, narrator's purpose in going to the trouble of recounting it.

I have mentioned that Sheila's, the Reporter's, and the Professor's accounts are fabricated accounts. I am, as might be expected, not privy to the conversations of the protestors, or reporters who covered this story, or even any sociologists studying the aspect of protests mentioned in the grant proposal. I wrote those accounts myself. My intention in doing it was merely to produce translations of the AP article into "normal" written and spoken English. When I discovered that I couldn't possibly get a

sentence-for-sentence translation that looked remotely natural, as is evident in the introductory section of this paper, I realized that to produce a plausible written or oral account, I would have to have a purpose for doing so. Thus the Professor, Sheila, and the Reporter were born, in that order. My main concern in creating their accounts was that they sound like what they purported to be. I did not consciously plan their accounts any more than I do my own--I just became a method actor, and pretended I was in their positions, and wrote what came, trying only to fit in as many facts as could be considered relevant (they all share my love for completeness). I did, however, ask unsuspecting non-linguists if they thought they were reasonable facsimiles of what they were supposed to be. I got comments on specific phrases, on Sheila's articulateness, and on her relative lack of excitement in earlier versions, but no comments that suggested anything suspicious about the organization of these accounts, in the sense of the ordering and subordinating of facts; there were no comments to the effect that "this would be an odd way for such a kind of person to tell it." So I felt comfortable enough with them to go on with the research, regarding it as a sort of pilot study, or at least a plan for one.

In the best of all possible worlds, of course, one would want to stage an event, interview participants and observers, and obtain, by some legal subterfuge, a newsperson's edited and unedited copy reporting it, and a report of it for some academic purpose, and establish experimentally their relative appearance of organization and ease of comprehension. But this is the real world, so I have had to start with this.

I want to make it very clear, however, that with the exception of the Professor, it was in analyzing what I had written, not in preparing to write it, that I found their goals for telling the story, as well as the organization of their narratives.

Returning now to the point of this section, it is time to ask what their goals are, and how they affect the structure of their accounts. The Professor's is to provide an example of the object to be studied: protests which end with police intervention. The Professor provides a very complete account, but highlights and zeroes in on details interpreted as possibly contributing to the intervention. Unlike the other narrators, the Professor mentions the symptoms of intervention in the first, summary, paragraph, and is very complete there about the cause and purpose of the arrests. Furthermore, in the Professor's narrative, the differences between the protestors' account and the police account are made explicit, and each accorded separate but equal status.

Sheila, on the other hand, was a participant in the protest, and has a stake in her version of the incident being accepted. Her ordeal is just over, and she wants to talk about it. She's been thinking about it a lot, so there are a lot of details she includes. Furthermore, she has it in for the police. Consequently, the guts of her version make it into her initial, summary "paragraph," along with a strong implication that the police acted with political motivation--that the arrest was in effect harassment. She has a lot to say after her chronology about the behavior of the police, but her concern for the injured is no more than an afterthought to that.

The Reporter, like Sheila, was present at the event, but is a neutral observer (despite, like the anonymous AP reporter, presenting the protestors' version of the incident first, which may reflect prejudice in their favor). Reporter's goal is initially to satisfy Spouse's curiosity, but also, beneath the level of consciousness, to discharge some of the tensions generated in rushing to get an acceptable story ready for broadcast. The Reporter's first summary is very brief and general (14 words), but the account which follows in response to a request for details is relatively complete, though sketchier than the more exploitative accounts--probably less is relevant when the narrator has no ax to grind. The account is strictly chronological, except when interrupted by reflection and speculation about the agents and the women bystanders. But the injuries, and the fact that the demonstrators weren't formally charged, have no particular meaning for the reporter, and so come as afterthoughts.

Thus, the more coherent accounts are organized basically chronologically, variations determined by the motives of the narrator in telling the "story."

Purpose and Goals of Newswriting

The reasons why the news story is not organized chronologically too are likewise to be found in its purpose and in the subsidiary goals seen as serving that purpose. Conspicuously, there is supposed to be no "point" to a news story beyond presenting newsworthy facts for their own sake, to as large a readership as possible.[3] Beginning journalists are told that the

standard news story "has no conclusion" (Hough, 1975, p. 19). This ostensibly refers to their form, but it obviously influences their content in a significant way. The newspaper is supposed, among other things, to serve as a public record. It must provide an accurate record of important events, and the reporter is enjoined as here, not to interpret the event, but just to record the observable facts.

> Show, don't tell. Telling makes the reader or listener passive. Showing engages him. Good writers let the words and actions of the participants do the work. (Mencher, 1977, p. 141)
>
> Just tell us what the guy did . . . Let the reader draw the conclusions. (Mencher, p. xiv)

And reporters are warned not to make an account of a protest, for example, into a story about the Shah's agents in the U.S., or police over-reaction, or extremist anti-democratic foreigners carrying on their political conflicts in this country.

But beyond this, there are a number of consciously taught practices of journalism, which originated historically in the service of this goal, which contribute to the cognitively peculiar organization of newswriting.

The Inverted Pyramid

To begin with, there is the so-called structure of the news story, the inverted pyramid.

> This consists of a summary lead and a development made up of details arranged in descending order of importance: the most important facts

> coming right after the lead, and the least important facts coming at the end. (Hough, p. 19).

Occasionally the journalism student is given an idea how to arrange the items in the body of a story, as here,

> the news story form or structure is simple and . . . most stories fit into this structure:
>
> . The lead
> . The material that explains and amplifies the lead
> . The necessary background
> . The secondary or less important material (Mencher, p. 91)

but more often the impression is given that there is no significant structure to a news story beyond the division into lead and body:

> each story requires the inclusion of certain facts. Once these essential facts are firmly in mind, the reporter makes a priority list: What fact comes first (the lead): what facts are next (the body)? (Mencher, p. 107)

The only criterion the newswriter is given is the subjective criterion of decreasing importance.

This criterion has more of the ontological character of a constraint imposed for the convenience of editors than a functional principle to benefit the reader.[4] As one current text puts it,

> most stories must be written in such a way that they can be [edited] quickly and efficiently. If the 10 inches of available space suddenly shrinks to eight, there is no problem. The news story structure

> makes it possible with the slash of a pencil to cut the bottom two paragraphs. (Mencher, p. 105)

However, the supposed needs of newspaper readers are frequently cited as well in rationalizing its use: "The formula," as Frank Luther Mott says in The News in America,

> may seem a tortuous and unnatural structure, but the reasons for it are clear. Most newspaper readers want it that way. They want to be able to glance at a headline, and if it seems to indicate subject matter of interest, to skim the cream off the story by reading a summary, and if interest still holds, to read most or all of the story."[4] (Brown, 1957, p. 61)

Brown comments:

> Convenience to the reader may be a rationalization for preserving the formula today, but it is certainly a logical reason in view of the fact that surveys show Americans spend only about thirty or forty minutes a day in reading the newspaper. The formula, of course, discourages reading to the end of a story; possibly the reader, had he not developed the habit of hit and skip reading would spend more time with the newspaper if the stories were written in such a way as to sustain his interest. Weekly news magazines, with a generally narrative treatment of events and with information that newspapers ignore about personalities and locales, apparently satisfy a demand that newspapers fail to meet. (Brown, p. 61).

Mencher is as certain as Mott:

> If the only justification of the standard news story form were its utility to the people writing and editing the news, it would not have stood up over the years. The form has persisted because it meets the needs of media users. The consumers of news usually want to know what happened as soon as the story begins to unfold. If it's interesting, they will pay attention. Otherwise, they turn elsewhere. People are too busy to tarry too long without reward. (Mencher, p. 105)

Nonetheless, the inverted pyramid is, in my opinion and that of a few outspoken journalists, a major contributor to the appearance of disorganization in newswriting. As Brown put it,

> As a form of writing, the faults of the inverted pyramid structure are fairly obvious. It often results in distortion and inaccuracy because of the reporter's desire to bowl his reader over in his first sentence: it is frequently hard for the reader to get the facts in sequence, since the emphasis is on the result rather than what led to the result . . . ; the reader is confused by the news account which twists events out of their natural time sequence or hopscotches from topic to topic because of the writer's attempt to conform to the theory of diminishing importance. (Brown, p. 64)

Brown cites a then practicing editor using even stronger language on this point:

Carl E. Lindstrom, managing editor of the Hartford Times, wrote in an article in Editorially Speaking, a publication of the Gannett group of newspapers:

> Just about everything that is wrong with news writing today can be traced to the pyramid lead. In itself it is bad enough with its primitive, out of breath, hit 'em in the eye approach. But to its crudity can be traced many other sins: incoherence, inaccuracy, loss of the unities of time and place, poverty of expression and, finally, the story's death through sheer exhaustion and general devility. Most newspaper stories come to an end like a guttering candle finally blown out. (Brown, p. 63)

Block Paragraph

News stories with the disordered structure ordained by the inverted pyramid format are made more difficult to follow and integrate by the practice of block paragraphing. Brown observed:

> Another dictum, called the rule of block paragraphing, was that each paragraph must stand as an independent unit, deletable from the story without affecting the sense. The block paragraph, of course, eliminated the transitions formerly used to create continuity. (Brown, p. 64)

Obviously, if paragraphs are going to be written so that they can be deleted from the story without its requiring further alteration, they cannot contain temporal or logical connectives such as meanwhile, later, therefore, however, which relate their content to something preceding them which an editor might want to cut. As Brown put it:

> The practice of shortening stories by leaving out whole paragraphs and inserting new paragraphs to bring them up to date has resulted in a tendency to leave out transitions and connectives. (Brown, p. 87)

Editorial pressure for short articles, and for the freedom to delete paragraphs at will, generates pressure against explicit anaphoric connection between sentences or other units of text. What might in another type of writing come out as: "X. The reason why X is significant is Y" gets written as: "X. Y."

Not only does the rule of block paragraphing greatly increase the difficulty of understanding a news story, by requiring the reader to infer the temporal and logical connections which cannot be stated explicitly, it reinforces the inverted pyramid structures; the only way a writer can include transitions is if it is certain that an editor will not delete material from the interior of a story, but only from the end.

There are four further sub-goals of newswriting which contribute to the peculiar demands made on the reader of newswriting. These are: minimizing sentence and paragraph length, making transitions by certain rhetorical devices, and including so-called human-interest elements. I shall discuss each of these in turn, beginning with the ideal of short sentences.

Short Sentences

In the mid-1940's, the AP and the UP commissioned a psychologist, Rudolf Flesch, and self-made readability expert and ex-reporter, Robert Gunning, to help them revise their style books so that their writing would attract more readers. Flesch and Gunning found that magazines that people found easy to read had an average of under 17 words per sentence, and ones that they found difficult had an average of more than 21 words per sentence. On the twin "correlation, ergo causation" assumptions that the former

publications were easier to read because they had shorter sentences, and that shorter sentences would make copy easier to read, journalism texts instructed aspiring newsmen to keep their sentences short. Mencher, for example, advises students:

> The press associations have concluded after a number of studies that one of the keys to readable stories is the short sentence. Here is a table. . . . Notice that an average reader will have no trouble with an average sentence of 17 words. (Mencher, p. 153)

Thus, writers are encouraged to express what they have to convey in brief sentences which are short on explicit connectives, since the easiest ways to make sentences shorter are to divide complex sentences into smaller, simpler ones, and to omit the connectives, since that can be done without affecting the truth, the grammaticality, or the specificity of the claims . . . and after all, the reader can put two and two together. (The problem is that the reader now has a harder time identifying the two and two first.) Flesch is fairly explicit on this point:

> Short sentences are easy to write. Remember that compound sentences --those with ands and buts--are not so bad; go after the complex sentences. Look for the joints where the conjunctions are--if, because, as, and so on--and split your sentences up. If you feel this makes your style too choppy, change the punctuation. There's a lot that can be done with semicolons, for instance. (Flesch, 1949, p. 129)

Interestingly, other textbooks, making the same point about reducing sentence length, urge avoidance of the semicolon:

In the interest of readability and clarity, stylebooks frequently urge newswriters to use short sentences and to avoid the kind of punctuation that encourages long sentences. The Detroit News stylebook warns:

> Semicolons should be used sparingly in news writing. When semicolons might be used in more formal writing, periods usually are better in a news story. (Hough, pp. 195-196)

The practice recommended by the Detroit News has the effect, however, on removing almost the only clue left for the reader that there is supposed to be some (obvious) relation between the propositions in one of the sentences and the propositions in the other, for that is what the semicolon implies: "The sentence after me is related to the sentence just before me (rather than to any larger stretch of preceding discourse), and the relation is so obvious that it needn't be explicitly mentioned."

The effect of the requirement of shorter sentences on inferencing demands is equally evident in books written for beginning readers. Here, sentence length in text materials is carefully controlled in the preparation of reading materials, again on the probably false assumption that long sentences are per se (and propter se) too difficult for the six or seven year old to understand (or "process"), and connectives are among the first things to go in the effort to make sentences as short as possible. The result is rather abrupt texts like the following passage from Babar Loses His Crown:

> . . . It is time for lunch.
> Babar takes them to a sidewalk restaurant.

> But Babar can't eat.
> He is thinking about his crown.
> He needs it tonight.
> He must wear it to the opera. (de Brunhoff, 1967, pp. 36-37)

With connectives this might be something like:

> It is time for lunch, so Babar takes them to a sidewalk restaurant. But Babar can't eat, because he is thinking about his crown: he needs it tonight, because he must wear it to the opera.

It is a relatively straightforward matter to determine whether the "benefits" of short sentence length outweigh the "costs" to comprehension of requiring the reader to infer connections between short sentences: rewrite standardly used short sentence-length passages using logical and temporal connectives to join two or more sentences at a time, and see which version is better comprehended at what ages and reading levels, using both oral and visual presentations.

Short Paragraphs

The last clue that propositions in two sentences are related is removed by putting the sentences into separate paragraphs. Flesch advises, somewhat enigmatically,

> You will improve the paragraphing--usually by breaking longer paragraphs into two or three smaller ones. Your shorter sentences will force you into shorter paragraphs: there is a natural relation between the two. (Flesch, p. 190)

This practice is encouraged by the same principle of convenience to editors that requires block paragraphing, since it makes it easier to delete material if the story needs to be shortened; and it is actively promoted, on the grounds that it makes the printed story and the paper as a whole more physically attractive to the reader.

> Long columns of uninterrupted lines of type appear dull; and dullness repels readers. Shorter copy results in shorter stories in type. The extra white space gained at the beginning and end of shorter paragraphs brightens the page, and both the page and the stories on it look more inviting.[6] (Hough, p. 31)

But its effect is to make the story, as a connected whole, harder to understand. The reason for this is that since a basic rule of paragraphing for "normal" writing is that sentences which address the same point belong in the same paragraph, putting two adjacent sentences in the same paragraph implicates that they address the same issue. And by implication, putting them into separate paragraphs implicates, if there are no connective phrases, that their contents are not particularly relevant to each other.

The effect of paragraphing was brought home to me in investigating the connectedness of the AP article. The first time I asked people about their reactions to "An Iranian Protest in Chicago," it was divided into four paragraphs, and drew very few comments that it seemed all jumbled up.

Connectives

The textbooks are not entirely unaware of the problem of providing sufficient connectives. Brown (1957) again says it well.

> Transitions are especially needed in newspaper writing because of the conventions of the inverted pyramid. When a story is told chronologically, it contains an inherent progression that carries the reader along. But when, as in the news story, the report begins with the end rather than the beginning, interpolated temporal transitions may be required to enable the reader to keep the time sequence straight. Thus, such expressions as "earlier," "later," "two hours before," and "subsequently" may be needed. (Brown, pp. 87-88)

But the solutions the textbooks propose are almost hopelessly naive. For one thing, along with a curiously large number of writers on discourse structure (e.g., van Dijk, 1977; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; cf. Morgan, 1978 and Morgan & Sellner, in press), they assume that rhetorical devices that are symptomatic of connected text are what makes the text connected. (This is like assuming that swollen parotid glands are the cause of mumps.) Consequently, they concentrate on the symptoms.

For example, a number of textbooks convey the impression that repetition of key words and phrases will connect sentences containing them. Writers are advised to "use pronouns to refer to nouns in previous sentences" (Mencher, p. 156), and that "repeating key words and phrases is also helpful in tying the story together" (Hough, p. 50). Hough also recommends using synonymous expressions for this purpose (pp. 50-51). But, of course, these will not by themselves make a text connected. It is a simple exercise to produce pieces of discourse which conform to these precepts, but which are not thereby made connected, for example, the paragraphs in (D) and (E). Mencher admits this,

> Transitions emphasize the logical order of a news story. But they cannot create coherence where there is none. (Mencher, p. 157)

but goes on the imply the opposite,

> Transitions are the mortar that holds the story together so that the story runs smoothly from start to finish. (Mencher, p. 157)

echoing Brown:

> In writing, the cement holding the blocks together consists of verbal transitions and connectives. (Brown, p. 87)

D. Mr. Maikovskis came to the United States in 1951. His well-kept home is almost obscured by trees and shrubbery. (From a 8/5/78 New York Times article about the shooting of an alleged Nazi.[8])

E. Special agent Myra Weinstein was found to be in possession of over $25,000 in counterfeit money. On Yap, money is in the form of stone wheels. The inventor of the wheel is unknown.

Similarly, aspiring news writers are told that sentences and paragraphs may be linked by repeating the sentence pattern (Mencher, p. 157). But if this were true, two unrelated adjacent sentences could be connected into a coherent text by, for example, topicalizing or inverting them both, as in (F). But obviously they cannot.

F. Among the high-rise building's tenants are the Iranian Consulate and the Chicago bureau of Newsweek magazine. Present when the fighting started were 11 officers, McLaughlin said.

The point here is that even if all the facts reported were relevant to the reader's interpretation of the news event (which they might or might not be), and even if they were presented in a logical order (which they aren't always, and which the textbooks do not discuss in any detail), use of these devices will not necessarily make the news story an easily comprehended text. For instance, the facts cited in the paragraph in (D) can, with a certain amount of imagination, both be understood as relevant to the reader's interpretation of the event chronicled in the news story, but they are not in the least revelant to each other, and the use of pronominalization in no way indicates what relevance they might be intended to have to anything. Consequently, it does not by itself make the paragraph or the text coherent.

These benighted ideas might be amusing if it weren't for the fact that they promote the writing of disconnected, poorly organized (or unorganized) copy, by encouraging in writers the belief that using such devices as these will make their stories hang together and be comprehensible.

When textbooks do get around to the use of phrases that assert or imply a specific connection between ideas, even then they may miss the point as often as they make it. For instance, along with the use of logical, spatial, and temporal connectives such as similarly, as a consequence, but, nearby, and earlier, Mencher and even Brown advocate the use of "additive" connectives such as and, also, and in addition to, which provide no information about the relation to each other of the propositions they connect. All they can do, and all that the use of pronouns and repetition does, is

to give the appearance of connection, and prevent the story from sounding at a very superficial level, as chopped up as it is.

"Human Interest"

I turn now to so-called "human interest"--the last sub-goal of supposedly successful newswriting that I will discuss. The importance of this aspect of writing is again a direct result of the Flesch studies.[9] Flesch found that magazines that his subjects found dull had fewer "personal words" per 100 words, and fewer personal sentences, by percentage, than magazines that they found more interesting, where personal words are defined as pronouns referring to people, proper names, words with lexical or morphological natural gender [father, iceman (!)], and the words people and folks; and personal sentences are defined as direct and indirect quotations; questions, requests, and exhortations addressed directly to the reader; exclamations; and sentence fragments. The result was that newswriters began to be urged

> to place as close to the lead as possible the high quality incident or anecdote that spotlights the theme of the story. Often, this will be an anecdote or example about the people involved in the situation that is being written about. . . .
>
> We are a little like Alice (of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland) when she says: "'What is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'" The newspaper reporter lets the illustrations and anecdotes serve as his pictures, and the quotes are his conversations. (Mencher, p. 142)

> Put good quotes up high. The reporter is alert to the salient remark, the incisive comment, the words of a source that sum up the event. Quotes help to dramatize the story as they permit the reader to visualize the person who is speaking. Quotes are also an aid in achieving verisimilitude, the feeling of truth. After all, if these are the words of a participant, the reader reasons, the story must be true. (Mencher, p. 141)

In Flesch's own, telling words, "for readability you need not only basic ideas and solid facts, but also a good collection of seemingly useless information" (Flesch, 1949, p. 26).

Reporters have told me that details like the color of the scarf are included to create the impression that the writer was an eyewitness to the event reported, so the report must be true, and that what I see as a redundant paraphrase and direct quotation is supposed to be seen as claim and evidence, and again inspire credibility in the text as a whole. But whatever the source of the injunction to include "colorful" details and direct quotations, its effect is frequently that relatively readable stories get littered with irrelevant details, like the color of the scarf one protestor used to hide her face, and uninformative quotations like the police commander's quote in the AP story. Quotations from the coaches that repeat the reporter's observations seem to be a standard fixture in game-sports reporting. Unfortunately, they are all too often the most connected part of the story.

Speaking generally, the fact that news reports must be written quickly to meet a rigid deadline exerts pressures which affect several aspects of

newswriting. First, there is pressure for a writing formula--any formula, since it is quicker to use clichés of organization both in the text as a whole and in individual sentences than it is to design an organization from scratch each time. Second, the pressure affects the nature of the formula, in that, for similar reasons, it has to be a simple formula, one that is easily satisfied. Finally, while there is no particular pressure for the absence of connectives per se, there is pressure for short sentences as part of the formula, on the assumption that it will take less time to construct a lot of short sentences than a few long and complex ones which have the same content. And as I have said, the easiest way to report complex material in short sentences is to leave out the explicit connectives.

Implications

What are the implications of this discussion of journalistic practices? The obvious answer for the field of journalism would seem to be that the "script" for writing news stories ought to be overhauled--that comprehensibility ought to be emphasized more than "readability" (the ability to attract readers), and that the teaching of news writing ought to de-emphasize the editor's convenience and the so-called readability techniques for seducing the reader into reading entire stories instead of skimming through them. But is there much hope for change? Maybe not, for the belief is pervasive that the reading public likes newspapers the way they are (cf. the quotes on pp. 25-26). The journalism establishment believes that people would object if news stories were written according to the usual literary conventions. The latter belief may be correct--both the

tropes and carefully turned cute phrases, and the casual syntax in a piece of writing like this article from the Palo Alto Times (7/26/78) are, I find, quite independently disconcerting, to the point that it is hard to take seriously news reported this way.[10]

'Surprise' wasn't a bomb, but 2 guitars

Palo Alto police cordoned off two blocks of University Avenue in downtown Palo Alto Monday after Swains's House of Music got two anonymous telephone calls about a "surprise" and a "bomb" outside the store in a burlap bag.

San Jose bomb disposal unit officer, Rick Confer, nervously unveiled the bags, beside the store, found two guitars--one of them as unstrung as the music store employees, and both missing a tuning peg.

One was an electric and the other an acoustic guitar, and the acoustic had been stolen earlier from the store, at 451 University, according to employee Michael Dunn. He said they aren't sure yet whether the other had been stolen or purchased.

Police speculated that the would-be musician was the one who bombed out on his music career.

.
.
.

While editors are no doubt correct in believing that the newspaper-reading public would object to news stories that couldn't be skimmed, I cannot see how simply making newswriting more connected and more comprehensible could make it less skimmable. It ought to make it more easily skimmable. A linguistics article with explicit connectives and clearly demarcated structure can be skimmed. Why should it be any different with newswriting?

No doubt one learns to read different kinds of texts in different ways. That presumably is how it is that we read newspapers and don't think much about it. What I am suggesting is that the genre of newswriting can be made more like other expository genres, without sacrificing the objectivity and timeliness that are the proper goals of newswriting.

If the journalistic powers-that-be really care whether the news is read and digested, as opposed to merely being circulated, they can insist that logical organization and explicit connectives be the most important determinants of the story's form, and that sentence length, "human interest," and the editor's convenience be considered of less importance. And they can ask text-writers to kill the advice that quotes and colorful details "brighten up" a story; when included for that purpose, they are more likely to attract attention to themselves and away from the news point of the story, and reduce the story to a jumbled collection of facts. Instead of teaching reporters cheap tricks to hide a multitude of flaws, instruction should concentrate on highlighting and enhancing whatever natural structure inheres in a story; the important question to ask about a story should not be "Is it flashy (or zippy or vivid) enough?" but "Is this a logically structured account?" And the key to writing good sentences within a story should not be "Are they short enough?" but "Is it going to be clear to the reader what the relevance of this information is, what the point of including it is?"

It has been suggested to me that such a goal conflicts with the reporter's ethic not to interpret or evaluate the news--that using logical connectives like <u>accordingly</u> and <u>therefore</u> constitutes interpreting the

facts, not merely reporting them. In support of this, let me mention that in the interest of maintaining an appearance of objectivity and protecting the image of their paper as accurate, reporters are cautioned to attribute to a source every statement in their stories which is not common knowledge, a matter of public record, or verified by the direct observation of the reporter (Mencher, 1977, p. 34). The reporter who takes this literally strictly limits the logical connectives which can be used to whatever ones his quotable sources happen to provide.

But the excuse of objectivity is not consistent with the fact that among the connectives which the texts direct the reporter to learn to use are: accordingly, finally, thus, so, as a consequence, and the like. On the other hand, such connectives seem to be used only rarely in today's newswriting. Much more common are the use of and and temporal connectives such as when and after to implicate a causal connection--as in these excerpts from recent AP stories.

> A gasoline storage tank exploded in flames Sunday at a Shell Oil Co. facility on Rough and Ready Island [and] burned out of control for hours.
> "Gasoline fire controlled" Champaign-Urbana Morning Courier, 23 Oct., 1978, p. 2.

> They said the fighting began [when] the protestors ignored a police warning [and] continued burning government buildings and banks.
> "15 slain, hundreds hurt in Iran clashes" San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle, 29 Oct., 1978, p. 16.

Causal connectives apparently are sometimes omitted entirely with no appreciation of the demands this makes on the reader. Thus Mencher quotes "an experienced reporter" commenting on this AP wire story

> HARTFORD, Conn. AP - The Connecticut Public Expenditure Council, a private fiscal watchdog, said today that Gov. Ella Grasso's proposed $1.43-billion budget would spend more than the state's economy could afford.
>
> The new governor has proposed what she calls an austerity budget for the coming fiscal year.
>
> But the watchdog group said that state spending must be cut beyond the Grasso recommendation. It also recommended a state constitutional amendment requiring the budget to be in balance at all times.
>
> There is an estimated deficit of $90 million in the current Connecticut budget. Governor Grasso wants to pay off the deficit with some short-term borrowing, but the Expenditure Council says the deficit should be paid off in the next year's budget "to protect the state's financial credibility."
>
> The council is supported by the business community.

with these remarks:

> "The last graf is the reporter's attempt to give the reader the why of the Council's opposition--it's a taxpayer's group that likes austerity budgets because it means lower taxes. Nice touch." (Mencher, p. 37)

And what are the implications for linguists of this demonstration that structure at the discourse level is significantly affected in complex ways by the perceived goals of the discourse? At the most general level it

implies that it is futile for text-linguists to look for "text structure" without taking into account the producer of the text, in particular, the producer's presumable intentions in producing the text. In general terms, that text-linguistics, along with sentence-linguistics and reference-linguistics have got to deal with Pragmatics. But that was perhaps already obvious for other reasons anyway.

There are other, less obvious, more contingent, and more "relevant" implications as well. When I began this research, my intention was to analyze game-sports reporting, and show that it was particularly disorganized and littered with facts of no obvious relevance. On the assumption that the sports pages were one of the few kinds of texts voluntarily read by youths considered to be poor readers, I suspected that part of the reason they were poor readers was that from reading mainly basal readers and sportswriting they had learned not to expect structure or connection in texts, and therefore didn't see structure, or infer connection, in better written texts (like their science texts, and history books, and reading achievement tests), and consequently read them as unordered lists of facts and failed to do an adequate job of comprehending them as texts in the expected way.[11]

Gunning also thought that the answer to why some people can't read lay in the fact that other people can't write. But his analysis was only that many apparently poor readers really could read--they just couldn't read bad writing.

> . . . it was apparent to me that much of the reading problem was a writing problem. The writing in newspapers and daily business was full of fog and unnecessary complexity. No wonder it gave the average reader trouble. (Dust Jacket to Gunning 1952)

What I am hypothesizing here is that many of them really can't read very well, and that that is an indirect result of the inexplicit connection of ideas in what they do read. Whether or not this is a plausible account is an empirical matter, and my claims are readily testable, I think at every point, save perhaps the claimed causal connection between not expecting structure and connection, and not inferring it when it is present. And if it is supposed, probably correctly, that not all reading comprehension difficulties of the sort suggested can be traced to a mania for the sports page, it isn't crucial; the kind of text that children are asked to read in the first two and a half grades suffers from many of exactly the same defects as newswriting: there is no significant paragraphing (in primers, each sentence on a page is set flush with the left margin), stories and sentences are rigidly held to very short maximum length, and what gets deleted when any kind of text is written under these restrictions is again connective words, as seen in the example cited earlier from Babar Loses His Crown. Kids who are read to a lot, and who are encouraged to read, become good readers, and must learn to take this in stride; maybe kids who aren't, don't become good readers because they never learn to reconstruct what was intended, but not expressed.

It is worth investigating whether the paucity of connectives among sentences, and the inexplicit connection among ideas that results from the short sentence length mandated in texts used in reading instruction, may actually inhibit the development of text-comprehension skills, as I have suggested it might. Before the relevant experiments could be carried out, it would have to be shown, of course, to what extent, if any, loosening up the sentence length requirements, say after average mid-first grade competence had been attained, to allow a more natural use of connectives, would affect the acquisition of decoding skills and sentence-comprehension skills. Such an experiment would be relatively easy to design, it seems to me, and not require too much time to carry out. I suspect that the change would not significantly delay the acquisition of such skills, and might even hasten it. Designing the former, more global experiments may pose a few logistical problems, but I have faith in the ingenuity of psychologists.

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Footnotes

[1]The reason I did not present the text as 18 paragraphs here, as in the AP original, is that I feared it might be supposed to be simply an amateurly written and headlined news story, and that the disorder might not even be noticed, since it corresponds to what we have come to expect in newswriting. I realize that putting the 18 paragraphs into a single one slightly exaggerates the disconnected effect, since it places the burden of connection entirely on the use of order and connective words and phrases, but I do not think it seriously distorts the organization (or lack thereof).

[2]Cf. Bransford and Johnson (1973) for a demonstration of how much merely adding a title to a text improves comprehensibility (to experimental subjects). Here what we have added to make the story comprehensible is even less: a category label.

[3]In fact, there often is a point to a news story (cf. Molotch & Lester, 1974). But there is not supposed to be, and consequently, the point is not stated explicitly in the news story; journalism students are taught that the line between the editorial pages and the news pages is one which must not be blurred.

[4]The historical reasons for the establishment of the inverted pyramid formula, however, are only marginally related to this. As Brown (1957, pp. 59-60) explains:

The American method of news writing evolved in the decades after the Civil War. One influence, no doubt, was the practice of press association correspondents, in telegraphing news, to give important details in brief dispatches comparable to the bulletins of today. These were printed in the order of receipt.

Another factor in the evolution of the news story form probably was competition and the growth in size of newspapers. Since type was set by hand and publishing processes were slow, it was often necessary to give the gist of a story in the first sentences, because time did not permit printing the full account. Thus, by the 1870's, such an editor as Samuel Bowles of the Springfield Republican was instructing young reporters: "Put it all in the first sentence." Bowles had also learned that readers did not care to read a column of material to get at the news, and he would advise: "Don't suppose that anyone will read through six lines of bad rhetoric to get a crumb of news at the end."

This practice had hardened into a formula when E. I. Shuman published the first textbook in journalism in 1894, titled Practical Journalism. He wrote that "the style followed almost universally in large American newspaper offices at present" was to give the "marrow of the whole story" in the first paragraph. In an enlargement of his text in 1903 he introduced the formula of the Five W's--Who? What? When? Where? Why?--which had to be answered in what we now know as the lead of a news story.

[5]Frank Luther Mott, The News in America, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952, p. 159.

[6]I have no doubt that this is correct. I know of people who do not read the New York Times precisely because they find the relatively unrelieved even appearance of the page intimidating. This is not due to

paragraphing, however; paragraphs in the New York Times do not appear to be significantly longer than those in news stories in other papers.

[7]Of course, it is always possible to imagine a context where a speaker or writer might plausibly assume that some particular connection between two apparently random facts was obvious, but any connection is made entirely by the listener's or reader's inferences from adjacency, not by any grammatical device the utterer has exploited.

[8]Example (D) is the eleventh paragraph of a story from the New York Times (Aug. 5, 1978), reprinted here in its entirety.

Man Accused of Nazi War Crimes
Is Wounded by Shots at L. I. Home

By ROY R. SILVER

MINEOLA, L. I., Aug. 4 - A 73-year-old retired carpenter who has been accused of being a Nazi war criminal and whom the United States is attempting to deport was shot and wounded at his home here today.

The victim, Boleslavs Maikovskis, who was tried, convicted and sentenced to death in absentia for war crimes in Latvia by a Soviet court in 1965, barricaded himself in the basement of his small, three-story frame home after his assailants fired at him with a small-caliber weapon through a rear door of his home, at 232 Grant Street.

Mr. Maikovskis, wounded in the right leg, called the Nassau County police emergency number, 911, about 8 A.M. His wife, Janina, was at work in New York City at the time.

Mr. Maikovskis was described in fair condition at nearby Nassau Hospital after undergoing surgery.

Aid to Nazis Charged

The short, thin, bespectacled man with receding gray hair, whom neighbors described as a very quiet person who attended church

regularly, has been charged by witnesses at recent deportation hearings with having been a police "commandant" in Nazi-occupied Latvia who rounded up Jews for execution at the Dwinsk ghetto in 1941 and 1942.

The police said they believed the shooting had been done by two men who might have escaped in a white van with a blue stripe.

Phil Baum, associate executive director of the American Jewish Congress, condemned the attack, saying:

"This violence beclouds the issue and inspires sympathy for those accused of heinous crimes. It diverts public anger and lends plausibility to the claim of vindictive persecution. Those who want to really see war criminals punished must join in condemning this cruel, pointless and stupid act."

A police spokesman said that "a J. D. L. insignia" had been found on the back porch, near the door through which the shots were fired, and added: "We are investigating the possibility that it was left by his assailant."

Members of the Jewish Defense League have demonstrated in front of the home three times in the last few years, the last time last May.

Speaking from her New York office, Bonnie Pechter, national director of the league, denied that her organization was involved in the shooting, saying:

"The J. D. L. does not involve itself in murder or shooting. Hopefully, through our activities, there were people who understood what had to be done. The tragedy is he was just shot in the leg. A man like that deserves to die."

Mr. Maikovskis came to the United States in 1951. His well-kept home is almost obscured by trees and shrubbery.

The initial hearings by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to deport him for allegedly obtaining an immigration visa through fraud and deception were started in November 1976.

He Balks at Testifying

Witnesses testified at hearings that Mr. Maiskovskis had been involved in war crimes, but he refused to testify, claiming Fifth Amendment immunity.

His appeal from an order from the district director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in New York that he testify is scheduled to be heard next month by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Norma Santoro, a neighbor, described the Maikovskis couple as "very quiet" and said she did not know his background until the Jewish Defense League demonstrations started.

[9]Brown (pp. 64-65) thought that the work of Flesch and Gunning was leading to the improvement of newswriting. On the contrary, I feel that many of the principles and properties of newswriting most detrimental to comprehension are directly or indirectly attributable to it.

[10]Flesch's own writing suffers from this defect, for he practices what he preaches--and the result is a style so intimate that it is hard to assume that the man has something significant to say. Some examples:

> I am sure you realize by now that this book is not dealing with what usually goes by the names of grammar, usage, composition, or rhetoric. On the contrary. If you want to learn how to write, you need exact information about what kind of language will fit what kind of audience. And scientific data about the psychological effects of different styles. And hard, usable facts and figures about common types of words, sentences, and paragraphs. And knowledge of the results achieved by various writing techniques. In short, you need a modern scientific rhetoric that you can apply to your own writing.
>
> That's what I tried to put into this book. (Flesch, p. 9)

> But you don't even have to use Thorndike to find simple synonyms. I shall give you a sort of miniature Thorndike right here and now.
>
> My simple-word-finder comes in three parts--three lists of words. If you use these three lists conscientiously and fully, your style will soon lose its heaviness and begin to look like the girl in a Success School advertisement after. (Flesch, p. 131)

[11] I have not used sportswriting to make my point here, because I realized that the more generally read regular newswriting had the same defects. Although a sports event like a basketball game may be a lot more complex than a routed political protest, the same kind of demonstration by comparing accounts could have been made using a report of a sports event.

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